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ABSTRACT

The qualitative research described here studied interactions between first-year teachers and their teacher colleagues in an effort to understand how beginning teachers construct their interactions and employ them to master the curriculum, understand the grade level being taught, and gain control of classrooms. Seven beginning elementary school teachers, graduates of the University of Florida, were interviewed three times about their first-year experience. Four of the teachers expected to find support and assistance from other teachers; three were reluctant to share problems and concerns with others. Analysis of the findings suggests that beginning teachers who pursued collegial interaction were also the most reflective thinkers. Their professional development was nurtured by the peer teacher, and the habit of critically examining practices was established. During their interviews, they easily explored a variety of explanations of classroom events, a range of alternatives, and both intended and unintended consequences of their practices. The three teachers who were isolated identified a narrow range of explanations of classroom events, chose and implemented one strategy, and were wary of openness and unintended consequences. Implicit for teacher educators is the need to assist students in understanding the importance and potential of networking. (LL)

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SURVIVING THE FIRST YEAR: BEGINNING TEACHERS' CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR COLLEAGUES

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association
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Many teacher educators have recognized the significant impact the first year of teaching has on a teacher's future professional development (Hall, 1982; Howey & Bents, 1979; Johnston, 1985; Ryan, 1979; Vaughan, 1979). The first year of teaching has been described as "trial by fire" (Hall, 1982), a time during which many beginning teachers "sink or swim" (Lortie, 1975). From the first day of their first teaching job, novices are expected to fulfill the same job expectations and responsibilities as experienced teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Glassberg, 1979; Lortie, 1975; Ryan, 1979; Veenman, 1984). Beginning teachers must learn to teach while they are teaching; they are both learners and teachers (Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, and McLaughlin, 1989).

Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) have suggested that "the uncertainties of teaching are exacerbated by the fact that teachers cannot easily turn to one another for help and support. This reality is especially salient for the novice who must 'sink or swim' alone" (p. 517). Grant and Zeichner (1981), however, have noted that many beginning teachers identified informal interactions with experienced colleagues as a significant source of support. Other researchers have also noted the importance of interactions between experienced colleagues and beginning teachers and suggest that these interactions vary across three dimensions: who becomes an important colleague; how much support is given; and who initiates and sustains the relationship (Wildman, et al., 1989). It is unclear, however, why these dimension of contrast are important and why beginning teachers vary in their interactions with experienced colleagues. The purpose of this study is to discover and describe the interactions between first-year teachers and their teacher colleagues, and to understand what influences those interactions.

Methodology

When choosing a methodology the researcher takes into account the nature of the subject being studied, the underlying goals of the research, and the researcher's theoretical perspective. The choice of methodology is influenced by the question the researcher asks, as well as the researcher's view of the world and how it is to be understood (Firestone, 1987).

This research project was undertaken with a symbolic interactionist's point of view (Blumer, 1969). Inherent in this perspective is the notion that beginning teachers' interactions with their colleagues arise out of the reciprocal interactions between the beginning teachers, their colleagues, and the school context (Shulman, 1986). Teachers define their roles and actions in terms of how they define their social interactions with others. Teachers construct their interactions, they do not simply respond to the environment. The focus of this study is to understand how beginning teachers construct these interactions and employ them in their efforts to survive, master the curriculum, understand the grade level being taught, and gain control of their classrooms. Qualitative research methods provide a means for understanding teachers' perspectives and actions.

Sample Selection and Methods for Data Collection

This study is part of a larger follow-up study investigating the experiences of elementary PROTEACH graduates at the University of Florida. The study was initiated during the Third Annual Beginning Teacher Conference in February, 1990. This conference, sponsored by the College of Education at the University of Florida, is organized so that graduates from the PROTEACH program may reunite in the spring of their first 3 years of teaching. All of the graduates of the elementary PROTEACH program in their first-year of teaching, who attended the conference, were contacted to be included in the interview study. Eleven beginning teachers were contacted to participate in the study and nine of them agreed to participate. Complete data sets were collected for seven of the participants. By beginning with those first-year teachers who attended the conference, the researchers had some preliminary insight into the teaching contexts and perspectives of the participants.

During the Beginning Teacher Conference the researchers collected data through participant observation. All comments by the beginning teachers about their teaching contexts, problems, and successes were recorded in field notes and audiotaped. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with each of these teachers once a month for the remainder of the school year. This resulted in three 45-minute interviews with the seven beginning teachers. The first semi-structured interview was organized around the teacher's thoughts and concerns as she reflected on her first year of teaching and her accomplishments. The second and third interviews focused on gathering information about the teaching context and teaching perspectives of each of these teachers. To ensure that the researchers were tapping what was most important in the minds of the participants, the interviewers used a conversational style such as occurring between two trusting parties (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). Though the researchers entered the interview with questions in mind, they were sensitive to the developing interactions between the researcher and the teacher and followed up on any questions or information offered during the interview (Bondy, 1984). Data from initial interviews were analyzed for emerging themes and used to inform subsequent procedures. Relevant questions emerged as the researchers developed an understanding of the teachers' perspectives.

Analysis

To discover what teachers perceive as influences on their practices, the Developmental Research Cycle, as described by Spradley (1980), guided data collection and analysis procedures in this study. In a qualitative study, data analysis begins at the same time data collection begins (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 19676; Spradley, 1980). Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommend using a portion of the data initially collected in determining the important questions in the study. The researchers entered the Developmental Research Cycle with a general, descriptive question in mind, "What are the experiences of first-year teachers?" Guided by this initial question, the researchers began to examine systematically the thoughts and responses of the first-year teachers. Spradley (1980) described a cyclical process of analysis. The levels of analytic inquiry include domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and searching for cultural themes. Each level of analysis guided the researchers in their search for

patterns and hypotheses about influences on teacher interactions.

Categories which emerged during domaining included "places where beginning teachers get ideas", "sources of support identified by beginning teachers", "things beginning teachers say about other teacher", and "things beginning teachers say about principals." As the researchers searched for patterns and connections between domains, a taxonomy was derived to represent emerging themes and the connections between domains. As significant domains emerged, they were further examined to determine defining attributes within each domain.

Beginning Teachers and Their Colleagues: Understanding Their Interactions

After conducting and analyzing the first round of interviews it became apparent that these beginning teachers were gathering many of their curricular ideas, knowledge of routines and procedures, and classroom management strategies from other teachers (Hayes & Kilgore, 1990). Our analysis began with a search for patterns of the kinds of help beginning teachers received from their more experienced colleagues and how this support influenced their emerging teaching practices and perspectives. Though all of the beginning teachers identified other teachers as their strongest source of support, differences similar to those identified by Wildman, et al. (1989) began to surface. As we endeavored to explain the differences that were emerging, we noted that there were two distinct groups of beginning teachers. Four of the seven beginning teachers entered their first year of teaching with the expectation they would seek and find the support and assistance of other teachers, while the other three teachers were reluctant to share their problems and concerns with their colleagues. The beginning teacher's willingness or reluctance to approach other teachers for assistance significantly influenced the types and frequency of interactions that the beginning teacher had with her colleagues. Therefore, in the following section, the case studies of these teachers will be presented in two separate groups: those who willingly sought help and those who were reluctant to do so. We will begin with those teachers who were reluctant to approach other teachers for assistance.

Stephanie, Mary and Elizabeth: "I Had My Pride"

Three of the beginning teachers, Stephanie, Mary, and Elizabeth, persistently felt the need to project to their colleagues an image of competency, of being in control of their classrooms and therefore not needing support and assistance from other teachers. For example, Stephanie, a third grade teacher in a rural elementary school, stated, "I have my Master's, I'm supposed to know what I am doing all the time." At the time Stephanie made that statement, she was experiencing considerable difficulties with classroom management. Despite Stephanie's growing fears that she was losing control of her class, she did not ask for help from other teachers until early spring of her first year.

According to Stephanie, "when you are a beginning teacher, you feel like you are in a glass bowl and that everybody else is looking at you...I was very self conscious...we had to be the perfect class." Stephanie further explained that "teaching is a profession that we can't make mistakes in." Stephanie was reluctant to admit her need for help and to reveal what she perceived as weaknesses in her ability to teach.

Elizabeth, a middle school math teacher, echoed Stephanie's concerns for perfection. Elizabeth, too, had difficulties sharing her problems with others. Elizabeth stated," My anxiety to make everything perfect was stressful." Elizabeth taught in a school with a predominately low SES, black student population. Elizabeth's goal for her first year of teaching was to raise her students' academic achievement by boosting their self-esteem. Elizabeth felt that it was important to maintain high academic standards while improving her students' abilities to achieve those standards. Initially, Elizabeth was unsuccessful in achieving her goal. At the end of the first nine weeks, Elizabeth was reprimanded by her principal due to the large number of F's that Elizabeth had given her students. As she reflected on her initial year of teaching, Elizabeth noted, "I tend to want everything to be serious...I was so concerned with not wasting time, I was not as relaxed as I would like to be." Elizabeth consistently strove for perfection from herself and from her students.

Elizabeth cited her peer teacher (assigned through the Florida Beginning Teacher Program) as her most important source of support during her first year. Yet Elizabeth did not feel that she had received sufficient assistance or support from her. Despite reassurances from her peer teacher that she was "doing fine", Elizabeth was not rehired for the following year. Elizabeth had been surprised to learn that she would not be rehired and attributed that decision, in part, to her inability to share her successes and failures with her peer teacher and administrators.

Mary, a fourth grade teacher in a predominately white middle class school in a small suburban town, also felt the need to project an image of being in control of her classroom. Mary, however, experienced significant problems with classroom management throughout her first year. In particular, Mary had difficulty with managing several children with behavior problems, children who were black and poor. Her problems were significant enough that her principal had spoken with Mary concerning her interactions with black children. At one point, Mary canceled an interview because she was "so stressed out" from the problems at school. Yet, when Mary was asked by the interviewer to describe her first year of teaching, Mary responded, "I think I lived my dream. I think I had a great year." Mary seemed to believe that admitting to significant problems as a first year teacher was an admission that she was not a good teacher.

Because of their need to project an image of competency, these three teachers developed patterns of isolation from other teachers. Throughout the duration of the study, these three teachers made statements describing the isolation that typified their teaching experiences. For example, Mary stated, "I really haven't gotten close to any of them [other teachers]...It's because of me, I've just been real distant...I just didn't feel like talking to anyone." Elizabeth had not been able to communicate to her colleagues (or to her administrators) her concerns about her students and her struggles to improve their academic achievement. According to Elizabeth, others in her school "don't know what I am doing." Mary, Elizabeth and Stephanie seemed to believe that discussing their problems with others would reveal what they perceived as weaknesses in their abilities as teachers. Consequently, they avoided substantive dialogues with their colleagues concerning their problems and frustrations during their first year of teaching.

Occasionally, these teachers would break their pattern of isolation. For example, Stephanie, grappling with significant classroom management problems, eventually sought the assistance of another teacher.

Stephanie was motivated, in part, by desperation as she realized that she was losing control of her classroom.

> I realized that it was going to be worse if I didn't get some help. It was a big decision to seek help which I probably should have done before I did... [but] I had my pride.

It is interesting to note that Stephanie did not turn for help to those teachers who she thought were the better teachers in the school because she "didn't want them to know that I was having problems." She turned to another teacher who Stephanie viewed as less intimidating and asked her what to do.

> And she said, this is what you have to do. I needed somebody to say, this is what you have to do. Not "figure out what" or "reflect back upon"... I needed someone to say, this is what you have to do.

Stephanie asked for prescriptive advice. At this teacher's suggestion, Stephanie adopted Assertive Discipline in her classroom. According to Stephanie, at the beginning of the school year she had "wanted everyone to love me...I wanted to build a personal relationship with each students. ... but soon she realized that you can't love these kids into being a good student." Contrary to her earlier desires, Stephanie became more emotionally distant from the children as she implemented Assertive Discipline. Although Stephanie explained that she didn't like Assertive Discipline, she explained that she "didn't know what else to do." Stephanie was unable to engage her colleagues in discussions concerning alternate discipline policies or modifications in the Assertive Discipline Program.

In a manner similar to Stephanie, Mary also asked for prescriptive advice concerning her management problems. Mary turned to her peer teacher (assigned to her in the Florida Beginning Teacher Program), who suggested using a behavior modification program. Mary noted that her peer teacher realized that "in order for me to teach well and feel happy with myself, I needed to have something I could check off and say okay." Mary asked for and received specific instructions on how to manage her behavior modification program. Mary did not explore explanations for these children's behavior nor develop a variety of strategies for resolving her management problems. Mary relied exclusively on her system of assigning points as rewards. As she continued to experience difficulties, Mary would, once again, ask her peer teacher what to do.

For both Mary and Stephanie, their fear of losing control eventually led them to seek help. However, that fear also seemed to limit their openness to exploring their problems and searching for alternatives. They wanted and asked for simple solutions to the complex problems of classroom management.

During the final interview, Mary seemed to realize that isolation from other teachers had limited her professional growth. She stated, "There's so many good things going on in other classrooms, and I have no idea what goes on in the other classrooms." By asking for prescriptive advice, Mary narrowed her range of alternative strategies and limited her sources of support.

Unlike Mary and Stephanie, Elizabeth did not have significant management problems. However, Elizabeth's inability to share her concerns about the academic achievement of her students may have contributed to her eventual dismissal from the school. Similar to Mary and Stephanie, Elizabeth had limited her sources of support and range of alternatives in attacking the difficulties of improving the academic achievement of low achieving students.

Stephanie, Elizabeth, and Mary: Making Sense of Their Isolation

Previous studies on teacher induction have suggested that the school context is a strong and pervasive influence on beginning teachers' professional growth (Kilgore, Ross, & Zbikowski, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Wildman & Niles, 1987). Though the scope of this study is not broad enough to determine the extend to which factors in the school environment reinforced these teachers' reluctance to interact with other teachers, their behavior typifies traditional descriptions of teaching cultures that exist in the literature. The physical isolation in schools promoted by the cellular arrangement of classrooms, sends a message to teachers to cope with their problems individually (Dreeben, 1973; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Though it is possible these beginning teachers remained isolated in response to the institutional structure, our data suggests that these beginning teachers actively constructed their isolation in an effort to protect their teaching image and self esteem.

These three teachers each dealt with difficult problems that virtually all teachers experience. Yet, they seemed to believe that if they were good teachers they should not be having these problems. Rosenholtz (1989) found that isolation results when teachers try to protect their self esteem and cast themselves in the best possible light. She suggests that professional isolation has profound implications especially for beginners:

> They must rely primarily on their own ability to identify problems, develop solutions and choose the best alternative. With little access to role models among their peers they rely on their own memories of good teachers they recall from their own student experiences instead of gaining substantive knowledge from their more expert or experienced colleagues. (p.430)

Many teacher researchers have concluded that beginning teachers withdraw into isolation in order to survive their first year and "pass the test" (Johnston, 1985; Lortie, 1975).

The reluctance of Mary, Stephanie and Elizabeth to share their frustrations and concerns contributed further to the problems that they were experiencing. Lortie (1975) suggests that teachers' unwillingness to share their failures and frustrations intensifies the burden of failure. Beginning teachers adopt an individualistic response and are unable to see that the problems they are experiencing are common to all teachers. According to Lortie, it is primarily through interactions with colleagues that beginning teachers are eventually able to cope with feelings of self doubt and gain the reassurance that they are making a difference in children's lives. Lortie's conclusion implies that the self esteem of these beginning teachers would have been heightened through conversations with other teachers. In addition, by discussing their concerns with other teachers, these beginning teachers would have been able to continue growing professionally. However, by limiting their conversations with others and avoiding explorations of their concerns, these teachers significantly narrowed their range of alternative explanations of classroom events and alternative strategies.

It is also possible that these beginning teachers were influenced by school norms regarding the appropriateness of giving or asking for advice (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). The advice Stephanie and Mary received are typical of traditional descriptions of collegial interactions (Zahorik, 1987). Advice centered on

materials, discipline, activities, and problems with specific children. Elizabeth shared few reports of discussions with other teachers, though she revealed that she occasionally benefited from informal discussions with other teachers after school. Traditional descriptions of teaching cultures reveal that teachers are hesitant to offer advice, ask questions, or engage in critical discussions of teaching practices with other teachers unless they are approached by another teacher and encouraged to do so (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Consistent with Feiman-Nemser and Floden's (1986) findings, our data indicate that Stephanie, Elizabeth, and Mary actively participated in constructing their interactions and dialogue with other teachers. These beginning teachers were offered support and advice only when they sought it out and only in the terms for which they asked. When Stephanie and Mary did break out of their isolation in a desperate attempt to regain control and survive the year, they asked for help in ways that demanded prescriptive advice. These teachers did not ask for and were not encouraged to participate in any critical discussions of their teaching practices. When Elizabeth did interact with other teachers, she consciously refrained from asking for advice or exploring her concerns.

To conclude, our analysis indicates that these teachers did not passively respond to their respective school contexts, but were active in creating their contexts. Their need to project an image of being a good teacher, a good teacher being defined as one who does not have any problems, led these beginning teachers to isolation and resulted in receiving primarily prescriptive advice. Despite their frustrations, these three teachers, unlike the four described in the next section of this paper, did not attempt to develop informal sources of support and assistance.

Nancy, Becky, Anne, and Susan: "I Went in There Expecting Help"

The other four teachers in the study began their careers with the expectation that they would be able to find other teachers to provide assistance and support. That is, from the first days of preplanning, they looked for other teachers with whom they could share their ideas and discuss their experiences.

For example, Nancy, a third grade teacher in a low SES, predominately black elementary school commented, "I went in there expecting help." Nancy's concerns during her first year of teaching focused primarily on the problems of meeting the needs of low SES, low achieving children. Nancy talked repeatedly about the connection between low self esteem and low academic achievement, and the need to work on the self esteem of the children in her classroom.

Nancy also had ethical concerns about the resources and support that her school received from the county school system; she believed that the limited resources available to the faculty and staff were inherently unfair considering the special needs of the student population. Additionally, Nancy's school was marked by considerable dissension and strife between the faculty and the administration. The school climate also contributed to tense relations between teachers as they fought among themselves for political power. Despite the difficulties of her particular situation, Nancy sought other teachers to whom she could turn for assistance and support. As Nancy observed, "the school does not have a very supportive environment, but, of course, you can find those teachers that are."

Initially that support came from another beginning teacher. According to Nancy, "we were thrown together in the same situation...When I didn't have the administrative support I needed, she would be there."

According to Nancy, her principal was often unsupportive and openly critical of the teachers in his school. Yet the school-wide discipline policy, Assertive Discipline, required the intervention of the principal for certain disciplinary infractions. Because Nancy consistently received criticism from her principal concerning her management decisions, she turned to the other beginning teacher for assistance with her discipline problems. The two teachers began to use each others' classrooms as a time-out area. They also discussed and shared discipline strategies that they were implementing in their classrooms.

As the year progressed, Nancy was also able to enlist the support and assistance of other teachers. According to Nancy, "a group of us decided that we would try to handle all the problems that w' had with children among ourselves." Nancy came to rely on conversations with these teachers to help her develop alternative plans and strategies for dealing with management concerns. Nancy was able to develop a range of strategies to deal with her discipline problems such as individual conferences with students, phone calls to parents, and home visits. On occasion, other teachers in her school (in particular the Chapter One teacher), would accompany Nancy on her home visits.

According to Nancy, other teachers would also seek her out, to see if she needed assistance in solving problems.

> I went to them one time [for help] and after that, they would come to me to see if I needed any more help. And they were great. And I would find things in my mailbox - read this, I tried this in my classroom with this child, maybe you could try it in your's with this child.

By the end of the school year, Nancy had developed a strong network of teachers to assist her with her management problems.

However, not all of Nancy's interactions with other teachers were supportive.

> There was some, a handful of teachers that were fantastic...But it was only a handful...I went to some of the other teachers for help, some of them would give it, but they seemed to be talking down to me - demeaning...Some of the more experienced teachers would say, "Oh, it's because you are a beginning teacher." But I didn't need to hear that, I didn't need to hear that my problems were just because I was a beginning teacher.

Although Nancy realized that some of her problems were due to inexperience, she also recognized that many of her problems were the types of problems that all teachers face. Nancy was shocked at the "sink or swim" attitudes of some of the other teachers. Nancy had expected to be treated as someone who was capable of learning from the experiences of others. Although Nancy encountered teachers who refused to help and teachers who were nonsupportive, Nancy persevered in her efforts to find those teachers who were willing to listen and to share.

Nancy was able to find those teachers who shared her commitment to enhancing the self esteem of her students - teachers who recognized the special needs of the student population that they taught. By seeking support and assistance from others, Nancy developed a strong network of teachers who stimulated her professional growth and enriched her abilities to deal with the difficulties that she encountered in the classroom.

Becky, a sixth grade social studies teacher in an inner city school, faced many of the same problems that Nancy had encountered. She, too, had a high population of low SES, low achieving students. Her principal was also unsupportive. Additionally, the school climate was marked by racial strife due to a recent bussing decision that resulted in a mix of students from differing economic and cultural backgrounds.

In a manner similar to Nancy's, Becky began to search for teachers with whom she could share and discuss the problems that she was encountering. Initially, she was dismayed by the lack of commitment and concern that some of her fellow teachers displayed.

> I feel I wouldn't even want these teachers to help me [the teachers who have lost the desire to teach]: I'm like "stay away"...[But] there are some [teachers who are] very much into teaching and I try to stick around them. They are a source of encouragement. The others are just the pits. [They] are everything you are taught you should not be, right down the line. There are tons of them.

Though Becky was frustrated by the lack of commitment by most of the teachers in her school and the lack of collegiality, she persisted in finding like-minded teachers with whom to talk about alternative strategies and the evaluation of her practices.

Throughout the year, Becky persistently stated the need for her students to "learn to get along." As she explained, "these children don't know each other...they don't understand each other." Becky instituted a number of practices to teach the children how to communicate with and care about each other. Becky was able to work cooperatively with other teachers in her academy to establish consistent rules and expectations for their students.

Becky took a leadership role in developing these cooperative efforts. According to Becky,

> They [the other teachers in her academy] have supported me in it, like the rules I made up at the beginning of the year. They went along with those rules and they have been enforcing them in their classes as well. A kid can't come in my class and not do it and then go in another class and do it. It's the same in all the classes, it's been a big help; I don't think I could have done it if I had not had that.

An area of particular interest to Becky had been the development of cooperative learning strategies to help the children learn to respect and assist one another. Becky was also able to convince other teachers in her academy to use cooperative learning groups and to dispense with ability-based grouping in their classrooms. According to Becky, "The teachers I work with...have been a big help, and anything you come up with, they're pretty much willing to try."

Despite the lack of support that Becky encountered from many of the teachers in her school, Becky was able to develop a core group of teachers who shared her desires to develop a sense of community and a commitment to learning in their classrooms. Becky was able to share and evaluate her practices with these teachers and further enhance her professional growth throughout the first year.

Anne, a third grade teacher in a rural, low SES, predominately black school, also was able to find support and assistance from other teachers. Unlike Becky and Nancy, however, she found support among many of the teachers working in her school. According to Anne,

> I feel comfortable going to...almost any teacher in our hallway, there are three I talk to all the time...Every grade level, there's at least two people [four teachers per grade level] I feel comfortable going up to. I think school-wide, [the faculty] is pretty close.

Anne attributed the cohesiveness of the faculty to the sense of commitment that the faculty felt toward improving the lives of the disadvantaged children at their school. During one of the interviews, Anne made the following observations about her school:

> The people there really care about what they are doing...The facilities are really crappy, and it's an old, old school. Equipment's not great and it's definitely not pretty. When I went there for an interview, gag!...Such a dump! But once you're there, it's just a whole different thing...Teachers, as a group are there because they want to be...We work really hard to get the kids some place, because they come from some places you just can't believe.

Anne felt as though she were a member of a community characterized by a commitment to improving the quality of the lives of the students.

Most of Anne's support and assistance came from teachers in her grade level team. According to Anne, the other teachers in her grade level began providing support to her and another beginning teacher from the first days of preplanning.

> Right before the year began, we talked a lot as a grade level about the things they were using and there was another teacher, too, who was in her first year...We're a really good grade level. We all understand each other. We get along real well.

An area that initially concerned Anne was classroom management. Anne expressed her desire for "the kids to be respectful of me...and to feel comfortable with me...I didn't want them to be scared of me...I wanted them to behave and feel good about each other." Despite her desire for mutual respect and concern between teachers and students, Anne found herself "yelling at the students." Anne turned to other teachers for assistance. The other teachers helped Anne develop alternatives to "yelling at the students." A kindergarten teacher across the hall offered her room as a time-out option for disruptive students from Anne's classroom. Anne also began using a behavior modification program adopted throughout the school by other teachers.

Anne sought support and assistance for a variety of instructional strategies. She frequently described how other teachers assisted her in teaching specific skills, in particular, the basic skills monitored by the State Student Assessment Test (SSAT), a test that third grade students must pass in order to be promoted to the fourth grade. According to Anne, as the third grade teachers prepared for the SSAT, they would "communicate to each other about how we were going to do it, what methods we were going to use."

Anne, however, wanted to develop a curriculum that went beyond basic skills. She was concerned with developing more integrated units and decreasing the amount of seatwork that students were typically required to do in third grade. She wanted her curriculum to be "more cohesive and meaningful to the children." In the area of integrating units, Anne took a leadership role, motivating the other teachers in her grade level to work with her toward teaching across subject areas. Conversations with other teachers became critically important to

Anne as she gained their support and assistance in implementing an integrated curriculum.

Throughout the year, Anne felt that she and another beginning teacher at her grade level had received significant support and assistance from others. According to Anne, "I guess I'm getting a lot of feedback from the teachers that are close to us [Anne and the other beginning teacher]." Anne, however, had one reservation about the support that she and the other beginning teacher had received. She noted that teachers often offered reassurance rather than constructive criticism. For example, after a particularly difficult day, Anne had gone to another teacher to describe the problems that she had encountered that day. According to Anne, the other teacher told Anne, "Oh, you're doing fine." But according to Anne, "that's not what I wanted to hear." Anne wanted someone to help her critically evaluate her practices not to give her reassurances. Anne persevered throughout the year, searching for substantive dialogue with other teachers to help her grow professionally.

Susan, in a manner similar to Nancy, Becky, and Anne, also sought the support and assistance of other teachers. Susan, a kindergarten teacher in a predominately white, upper middle class suburban school had been trained to teach in the upper elementary grades. Susan had no previous experience in teaching kindergarten; she was unfamiliar with fundamental concepts concerning the educational needs of young children. Susan explained, "I had never been a kindergarten class before this year...My first kindergarten experience was when my kids walked in the room the first day."

Susan had difficulty conceptualizing the educational challenges of teaching kindergarten and formulating instructional strategies to teach young children. Susan seemed to view kindergarten teaching as a rather elaborate babysitting job.

> I've tied 6,000 shoes, blown noses, fixed up scraped knees...I feel like a mommy most of the time...I wish I could be teaching more but they just aren't capable of it.

Susan explained "I did not feel like I [was] using my brain anymore." She was also constantly surprised at the behavior of young children. According to Susan, "I was appalled...they were rolling around on the floor...I expected more from them than they could do."

In order to cope with the difficulties that she was encountering, Susan began to rely extensively on the support and assistance of her peer teacher, the team leader for the kindergarten. As Susan explained,

> My peer teacher is on my team and she's my team leader...She's done a lot for me; she's really helped me a lot.

The assistance that Susan received from her peer teacher extended directly into Susan's classroom. Susan's peer teacher would present lessons in Susan's classroom for Susan to observe. Susan's peer teacher would also take Susan's lesson plans, implement them in her classroom, then adapt them for Susan's use. According to Susan, her peer teacher

> held my hand throughout the entire year...She said...you need to do this, you need to do that...she would write down all the activities - this is what we're doing.

Due to her inexperience, insecurity, and ignorance concerning young children, Susan constantly sought prescriptive advice from her peer teacher and the other kindergarten teachers. When in doubt, she would ask, "look, am I supposed to do it this way or am I supposed to be doing it that way?"

Susan experienced considerable management problems throughout the year. At one point, she described her feelings.

> I'm thinking, my god, I'm never going to make it, cause these kids are just going to act like crazy people.

In the area of management, Susan sought the advice of a friend from college, a special education major who was teaching emotionally handicapped children. Susan began to implement a variety of behavior modification programs structured according to the guidelines set forth by her friend. Susan concluded that the behavior modification programs were successful; she did not search for alternative strategies because the programs "worked." Although dealing with typical management problems encountered when teaching young children, Susan rarely made statements concerning the socialization needs of young children. Rather she sought prescriptive advice from her friend in special education, implemented the suggested strategies as given, and looked no further for solutions to her management problems.

Susan's view of kindergarten and the educational needs of young children was also influenced by the school-wide and county-wide adoption of Gesell testing. Susan frequently referred to the Gesell program and often described her students with phrases such as "stuck in a stage" or "developmentally young." She seemed to have difficulty interpreting and analyzing information concerning the developmental needs of young children.

Throughout the year, Susan developed an eclectic assortment of beliefs and practices influenced by the Gesell testing, behavior management programs designed for emotionally handicapped children, and activities designed by her peer teacher. Perhaps due to her inexperience and insecurity, Susan tended to adopt practices without critically evaluating them. Although she sought the assistance of others, her interactions were shaped by her need for prescriptive advice rather than substantive dialogue.

Analysis

Nancy, Becky, and Anne: Making Sense of Their Collegial Interactions

Nancy, Becky, and Anne entered their first teaching position expecting, demanding, and seeking out collaborative and critical examinations of their teaching practices. These teachers were not concerned about maintaining a facade of perfection. For these teachers, good teaching was defined in terms of their ability to identify concerns about their teaching and to work with other teachers to explore, evaluate, and implement alternative strategies. Indeed, like the teachers in Ryan's study (1980), Nancy, Becky, and Anne were frustrated by responses from colleagues and principals that indicated their concerns were typical of first year teachers. These teachers wanted someone to help them think through their problems and devise a plan of action. Though many of their conversations with other teachers focused on traditional topics (Zahorik, 1987), Nancy, Becky, and Anne pushed for more. These beginning teachers extended conversations to include the clarification of aims for student learning and the evaluation of practices in light of identified aims.

Clearly, as with our analysis of the first group of teachers, these beginning teachers played a significant role in creating their contexts for professional growth. Though Anne described other teachers and her principal in ways that are reminiscent of successful schools subscribing to the norms of collegiality and continuous improvement (Little, 1982), Nancy and Becky's descriptions of their school contexts were markedly different. Both Nancy and Becky repeatedly expressed concerns regarding the strong and pervasive negative impact of their principal and other teachers on their daily school work life. Both of these teachers utilized their collegial network as a means for surviving in these contexts.

Descriptions of the collegial interactions and decision making processes of Nancy, Becky, and Anne are similar to those of reflective and empowered teachers (Bullough, 1989; Goodman, 1987; Ross, Bondy, & Kyle, forthcoming). Nancy, Becky, and Anne, (unlike the other teachers in this study), continually engaged in the reflective process of searching for alternative explanations of classroom events, identifying alternative strategies, and striving to examine situations from multiple perspectives (Kilgore, Ross, & Zbikowski, 1990). Their efforts to create a community of colleagues with whom they could discuss their concerns are typical of earlier descriptions of potentially empowered novice teachers (Bullough, 1989; Goodman, 1987). Nancy, Becky, and Anne, like those previously identified, were characterized by a concerted effort to extend their community of colleagues, a willingness to take risks, a strong sense of confidence, and a continuous search for alternative practices and perspectives. Wildman and Niles (1987) found that teachers who were empowered went to great lengths to gain intellectual control over their teaching, reflect on their teaching, and collaborate with their colleagues. Empowered teachers, suggests Frymier (1987), are characterized by a strong internalized locus of control. Frymier's (1987) list of characteristics typify what we observed in Nancy, Becky, and Anne - self confidence; a willingness to work hard, learn, and change; a sense of being in charge; and a feeling of importance. Indeed, these three teachers have emerged as leaders among their colleagues. Many times these teachers initiated changes that their colleagues later adopted.

As these beginning teachers continued their conversations with other teachers, they began to grow professionally. Their ability to articulate their purposes for education, identify alternative explanations of classroom events, and identify and evaluate alternative strategies was strengthened. This professional growth is what distinguishes this group of teachers from both the first group of teachers and also from Susan.

Susan: Making Sense of the Discrepant Case

Though Susan also entered her first year of teaching expecting and demanding support and advise from other teachers, the nature of the conversations between Susan and her colleagues differed substantially from those reported by Nancy, Becky, and Anne. Like Stephanie and Mary, Susan asked for and received prescriptions. Discussions of alternative explanations of classroom events or alternative strategies was not reported by Susan. Though she expected and received help, Susan did not attempt to evaluate critically the advise she was given. Discussions between Susan and her colleagues were typical by the traditional topics of conversation reported by the first group of teachers: materials, discipline, activities, and frustrations with individual children (Zahorik, 1987). Additionally, in a manner similar to Stephanie, Elizabeth, and Mary, Susan exhibited little professional growth during her first year of teaching. Each of these four teachers expressed

satisfaction with their first year of teaching and hesitated to identify areas for improvement.

Isolation versus Collegial Interactions: Making Sense of the Differences

As earlier studies of teacher socialization have suggested (Gehrke, 1981; Kilgore, Ross, & Zbikowski, 1990; Lacey, 1977), our data indicates professional development results from the interaction between the individual and the specific context. As we concluded earlier, Stephanie, Mary, and Elizabeth did not passively respond to their school contexts, but were active participants in creating their isolation. Lacey (1977) describes socialization as a dialectical process whereby, "the individual actor, who is at the intersection of 'biography' and the 'social situation' has some freedom to manipulate and change the situation while at the same time being constrained to adjust to it" (p. 95). Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) suggest that this perspective is now reflected in current research on the cultures of teaching: "Research on the cultures of teaching has begun to replace the image of a passive teacher molded by bureaucracy and buffeted by external forces with an image of the teacher as an active agent, constructing perspectives and choosing actions (p. 523). How might we explain he differences in perspectives and actions constructed by the beginning teachers in our study?

As we indicated earlier, our analysis revealed distinct differences in the propensity to be reflective between our two groups of beginning teachers. Reflective teaching is defined as a way of thinking about teaching practice that involves the ability to make sound educational and ethical decisions about practices and to assume responsibility for those choices (Goodman, 1984; Ross, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Ross, Bondy, and Kyle (forthcoming) suggest that reflective teaching requires the ability to explore alternative explanations and alternative strategies, and to view the situation from multiple perspectives. Reflective teachers must be introspective, open minded, and willing to assume responsibility for their actions. Stephanie, Elizabeth, Mary, and Susan identified a narrow range of explanations of classroom events, chose and implemented one strategy, and reported their conclusion that the chosen strategy "worked." Rarely did they indicate an openness to unintended consequences of suggest that they were continuously monitoring their impact on student learning. Nancy, Becky, and Anne, however, exhibited a tendency to be highly reflective about their practices. During their interviews, they easily explored a variety of explanations of classroom events, a range of alternatives, and noted both intended and unintended consequences of their practices. These three teachers were never completely satisfied, and continually searched for ways to improve their teaching practices.

Earlier we suggested that Mary, Stephanie, and Elizabeth persisted in maintaining an image of being competent; they protected this image by remaining isolated and limiting their interactions with other teachers. We have also noted that these teachers were less likely to identify dilemmas, and to explore alternative explanations and practices. Calderhead (1989) suggested that

> reflection, in the general sense of an appraisal of one's own work, may require not only the possession of certain knowledge, critical skills, and a way of conceptualizing one's own learning as a reflective process, but also a basic practical competence together with some degree of self-confidence. (p. 46)

The lack of self-confidence exhibited by these three teachers in fact contributed to their limited interactions with other teachers, and their discomfort in exploring concerns about teaching with either the researcher or other teachers.

Our analysis indicates that the development of teaching practices and perspectives is an interaction between the beginning teachers' expectations regarding collegial interactions, their propensity to be reflective, and the school context. The findings of this study indicate that this interaction is driven by the beginning teacher's framing of her institutional role (Schon, 1983). Schon suggests that the propensity to adopt a reflective stance when approaching decisions about practice is influenced by four factors: a repertoire of skills; the appreciation system; overarching theories; and role frames (p. 270). In our efforts to clarify the distinct differences in reflection we observed between the two groups of teachers, it became clear that the beginning teachers' framing of their institutional role (hence their expectations regarding collegial interactions) significantly influenced their level of reflection and consequently their stance towards their teaching practice. Schon writes,

> A professional role places skeletal demands on a practitioner's behavior, but within these constraints, each individual develops his own way of framing his role...The problem he sets, the strategies he employs, the facts he treats as relevant, and his interpersonal theories of action are bound up with his way of framing his role (p. 210).

Therefore, the teaching role does not present itself fully formed. Schon (1987) suggests that the practitioner, or in this case the teacher, constructs the role from the materials presented in the situation itself. When the teacher frames her role she, "chooses and names the things [she] will notice" (1987, p. 4). This suggests that the individual teacher defines the parameters of her role. Differences in role frames within the same profession indicates that beginning teachers are focusing on different components of the teaching role and interpreting components available to all teachers, differently. Some teachers in our study focused on a narrow range of tasks and responsibilities, while others broadened the scope of tasks and responsibilities that they included within their role frame. The individual's role frame serves to limit or broaden reflection (Schon, 1983). To clarify, Nancy, Becky, Anne, and Susan framed their roles in such a way that they believed other teachers were a significant source of support and advice. As a result of this framing, these teachers worked to bring reality to this image. On the other hand, Mary, Stephanie, and Elizabeth framed their roles in such a way that they limited their interactions with other teachers. By limiting their interactions with other teachers they limited the range of alternative explanations of classroom events and alternative strategies that they might have otherwise explored.

Once again, however, we are faced with the discrepant case of Susan. How is it that Susan can frame her role in such a way that she seeks out other colleagues, yet limit the scope of her reflections? It is here where we most vividly observe the influence of overarching theories on reflection. Susan could not explore a variety of alternatives and critically evaluate her practices because she did not possess any understanding of relevant developmental theories.

Making sense of Elizabeth's limited reflection was also difficult for us to resolve. She expressed a tremendous sense of commitment to teaching and her students; exhibited a strong sense of efficacy, the belief that she could make a difference with children and strong values. As we continued to examine Elizabeth's transcripts, it became clear that by constructing a narrow role frame and limiting her interactions with other teachers Elizabeth not only limited the range of alternatives she explored but also failed to share her appreciative system (her teaching values and student learning goals) with her colleagues or administrators (Schon, 1987).

Conclusions and Implications

Thus we continue the debate over who controls teachers' work, the context or the individual (Grant & Sleeter, 1985, 1987; Hatton, 1987)? As we have suggested, we view the control over teachers' work as an interaction between the individual and the context. We argue strongly that the individual teacher plays a significant part in creating her professional context. We would not argue, however, that beginning teachers can be empowered to overcome any existing school context. Indeed, Nancy, one of the teachers that we have identified as potentially empowered and highly reflective, decided to resign after her first year of teaching because the school context was so overwhelming and debilitating. However, the existence of two of our most reflective teachers in two of the most debilitating school contexts (Nancy and Becky) and two of our least reflective teachers in schools that were reported to be supportive of teachers (Mary and Stephanie), suggests to us that the individual plays a significant role in shaping her professional development. The lack of self-confidence and the need to portray competence in conjunction with their narrow role frame worked to inhibit the professional growth of Stephanie, Mary, and Elizabeth within supportive school contexts.

Though teacher educators are unable to change the school contexts their graduates may enter, they are potentially able to influence those areas of teaching that are determined by the individual teacher. Our findings indicate that those beginning teachers who were most reflective and potentially empowered framed their roles in such a way that they pursued collegial interactions. Teacher educators, like those in the University of Florida elementary PROTEACH program, who have identified reflective teaching as a programmatic goal (Calderhead, 1989; Goodman, 1987; Ross & Krogh, in press; Waxman, Freiberg, Vaughan, & Weil, 1988; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) should include a focus on the importance of creating and sustaining collegial relationships. Our findings suggest that collegial interactions support beginning teachers in their attempts to consider a range of alternative strategies and explanations of classroom events. It has been suggested that teachers are more likely to become empowered when they work in concert with other teachers (Maeroff, 1988). Goodman (1987) found that "becoming an empowered teacher was much more difficult if done in a vacuum" (p. 24). Teacher educators must not only teach preservice teachers networking skills, but also consider training in interpersonal communication skills. Those who are successful at networking tend to rely on strong interpersonal communication skills. Ryan (1979) writes "One could deduce that the psychologically strong individuals with well developed social skills will survive, whereas those who are uncertain and who lack interpersonal skills will fail" (p. 46). However, the beginning teacher must take an active role in encouraging dialogue and refusing to accept prescriptions. As Nias explained, "Talk emerges as the critical element enabling the formation of

individual values and related reference groups...The absence of opportunity or appetite for discussion emerged as a major source of dissatisfaction among these teachers, especially in their early years" (p.1985,115). Our data indicates that the absence of talk leads to a diminishing of professional growth as well.

One of the most encouraging findings in this study is the control beginning teachers have over creating their own contexts for professional growth. Beginning teachers are not passive victims of existing school cultures and therefore limited to responding in just one way. Bullough writes, "There are better and worse ways of surviving the first year of teaching. Better ways lead to the development of professional values and ideals; worse ways lead toward isolation and withdrawal into the security of the classroom" (p. 1989, 92). Becky and Nancy were in the most restrictive school contexts in terms of professional growth; yet they persisted in finding like-minded teachers with whom they could develop strategies and critically evaluate practices. Though Anne was frustrated on several occasions by her principal's unresponsiveness to her pleas to help her critically evaluate her practices and search for alternative solutions, she continued searching for conversations until she found one teacher who shared a similar perspective. These findings indicate that teacher educators need to help their students understand the importance and potential of networking, and that it can be accomplished within the most restrictive school contexts. Maeroff (1988) suggests,

> One explanation for the failure of teachers to take more of the initiative for change may have to do with the restraints that teachers impose on themselves. They are so accustomed to doing without power that they may overlook some of the possibilities open to them (p. 93).

Teacher educators dedicated to the development of empowered, reflective teachers must surface and confront preservice teachers' entering perspectives of their role as teachers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). It seems possible that the role frames of these teachers were never surfaced and confronted within the teacher education program. Stephanie, Elizabeth, and Mary appear to subscribe to a traditional role frame (teachers work in isolation) while Nancy, Becky, Anne, and Susan indicate they have adopted a role frame that includes working collaboratively with colleagues. Just as previous research indicates preservice teachers' implicit theories of teaching and learning limit the impact of their teacher education program (Bondy, 1989; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Goodman, 1988), beginning teachers' implicit role frames influence whether or not they will create a community of teacher colleagues.

It is also important to acknowledge that when these beginning teachers did seek support, assistance, and/or critical inquiry they rarely did so with the peer teacher they were assigned. However, it is possible that if the teachers in our study had been assigned a peer teacher at the same grade level or teaching the same subject, they would have been more likely to sustain dialogue with them. It is also possible that these beginning teachers sought out other teachers, because their assigned peer teachers perform an evaluative capacity in addition to providing support. If critical inquiry is to occur, it must be nurtured in a risk-free environment. It is also important to note, that when our potentially empowered, reflective teachers did engage in dialogue with colleagues, experienced colleagues persisted in offering sympathy, prescriptions, activities, and materials. If professional development is to be nurtured by the peer teacher, the habit of critically

examining practices must be established.

It is also important for teacher educators to expose their preservice teachers to the traditional cultures of teaching, traditional images of teachers' work, and traditional practices in teaching and why they persist. With this knowledge, beginning teachers are more likely to understand the appreciation systems of their colleagues and more able to share their own. By understanding each other's perspectives, efforts by beginning teachers and their experienced colleagues to communicate and work collaboratively may be enhanced. Rosenholtz (1989) suggests that a collective commitment to shared goals provides a focus for collegial action.

Though our finding are limited to the experiences of seven beginning teachers, they do indicate the potential strength of the individual teacher in creating her own context for professional growth. We are encouraged by the potential of individual teachers to make a difference in schooling and in the lives of children. Not only did Becky, Nancy, and Anne grow professionally, but so did the teachers in their collegial networks.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDES

March

1. What are you most proud of having accomplished during your first year of teaching? (consider instruction, curriculum, peer relations in the classroom)

2. What were you trying to achieve?

3. How did you achieve this?

4. Why was this significant to you?

5. What was influential in helping you with accomplishment? (consider: other teachers, aspects of self as teacher, teacher education, internship, parents, pupils, personal history, previous experiences)

6. How did others in your school view your accomplishment? The principal? Other teachers?

7. Give an example of something you taught in the last week that you think went really well. How do you know it went well?

8. Give an example of something you taught in the last week that didn't go as you had hoped. What were you hoping it would be like?

April

1. Think back specifically to aspects of your teaching that you felt the need to "work on" this year; examples might include an instructional or management problem, a social interaction problem, a new curricular area that you developed, a new instructional strategy or strategies that you developed. Please list as many as you can.

2. Choose one of the aspects listed above and describe the initial problem in as much detail as possible.

3. Discuss why you felt you wanted or needed to work on this problem or situation. Why did it concern you?

4. What possible causes and effects did you identify?

5. What possible solutions did you consider? How did you find these solutions? What role did other teachers or your principal play in the solutions you considered? Where did you go for help?

6. What solutions did you try? Why?

7. Evaluate the solution(s) that you attempted. Did it have the intended impact? How do you know? Were there unintended outcomes? Were you satisfied with the results? Why?

8. How do you think others in your school perceived your problem? The principal? Other teachers?

9. What did you conclude from this process?

May

1. During your first year who gave you the most support? Give examples of that support.

2. Describe your relationship with your principal; identify specific examples. Describe your relationship with other teachers in your school; parents; curriculum resource teacher.

3. What in the Beginning Teacher Program was most helpful to you? Why? What was the least helpful? Why?

4. What kinds of things do teachers in your school talk about? Formally? Informally? Give a recent example of each.

5. Is there anything you would change about your school? Why?

6. How is your teaching different from what you thought or hoped it would be this year?

7. Is there anything you are not doing now that you think you should be? What? Why aren't you? Why should you be?

8. As you think back over the year, describe four children who stand out as memorable and tell why.

9. Give an example of something you taught in the last week that you think went really well. How do you know it went well?

10. Give an example of something you taught in the last week that didn't go as you had hoped. What were you hoping it would be like?

11. Frequently as teachers end their first year they think, "I've really learned a lot this year. Next year I'll..." How would you complete this sentence?